

PANTHER DEATH PROBE ORDERED

U.S. Team Will Study Chicago Shootout

By JOHN S. LANG

WASHINGTON (AP) — Federal investigators have been ordered to probe the Chicago shooting deaths of two Black Panther leaders to determine if police committed any crime, the Justice Department said Friday.

The announcement came within hours after disclosure that, halfway around the world, U.S. diplomats in Algiers had told Black Panther Eldridge Cleaver he could have papers to let him return home where his revolutionary party is in the throes of a leadership crisis.

The Justice Department said it ordered a preliminary investigation of the Chicago shootings in response to a wave of requests from civil rights leaders.

Panthers Fred Hampton and Mark Clark were killed by gunfire during a predawn police raid on Hampton's apartment Dec. 4. If the preliminary investigation determines any crime was committed by police, the department said investigators will decide whether the federal government has jurisdiction.

Before the department announced its probe, six Negro House members said they will conduct their own inquiry into the incident by holding a one-day unofficial hearing in Chicago Dec. 20.

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Meanwhile, Sen. Charles H. Percy, R-Ill., said the U.S. Civil Rights Commission would be the best agency to look into police-Panther confrontations in Chicago and elsewhere. The commission's findings, he told a news conference, "would be acceptable to all sides."

Four days after the Chicago shootings, police in Los Angeles engaged in a four-hour gun battle with Panthers—another in a chain of violent confrontations which, along with ideological schisms and party purges, have devastated the party's leadership ranks.

The series of events presumably heightened pressure on Cleaver, the Panthers' best known leader, to end his self-imposed exile.

Diplomatic and law enforcement sources insist the government is not negotiating with

Cleaver, who fled this country a year ago to avoid prosecution for parole violation and assault with intent to kill.

But, the sources say, the United States is willing to furnish the fugitive Panther with a certificate of identification which would allow him to travel home by ship or plane from Algeria,

where he has found sanctuary. State Department press officer Robert J. McCloskey said Cleaver had shown up at a U.S. diplomatic office in Algiers on Nov. 27. He was accompanied by three men McCloskey said were sought for airline hijackings—Byron Vaughn Booth, Clinton Orbert Smith and James

Joseph Patterson.

All asked for passports to return to the United States, McCloskey said, but the requests were refused. Instead, they were told in later discussions they could have certificates which would be good only for travel to the United States.

McCloskey said no such docu-

ments had yet been issued. He added he had no indication that Cleaver had decided to use the certificate method of returning home.